

GAZETTE

County Council clashes with CSX over proposed cargo site

Beltsville spot among four potential Maryland locations

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by Daniel Valentine, Staff Writer

Prince George's County Council members criticized proposals to build a railroad and trucking cargo transfer station beside U.S. Route 1 in Beltsville at a July 14 meeting with railroad and state transportation officials, saying the local site will bring too much traffic and spoil the area.

"None of us see any redeeming qualities for this project in this area," said Councilwoman Mary Lehman (D-Dist. 1) of Laurel, who said the Beltsville site between Powder Mill Road and Sunnyside Avenue isn't appropriate for a major project.

Lehman and two other members met with the Maryland Department of Transportation and the CSX railroad company in Upper Marlboro for a briefing on the project.

The site is one of four that state officials are considering for a new Intermodal Transfer Station for CSX, the Florida-based company that handles most railroad cargo east of the Mississippi River.

The company is collaborating with the state to build the cargo transfer station, which CSX officials said they hope to have open by 2015.

Three other spots along the Howard and Anne Arundel county border in Jessup, Montevideo Road and Hanover are also being studied.

The station would be a central place for trucks carrying overseas cargo from the Port of Baltimore to transfer their loads to trains, which would then carry freight across the mid-Atlantic states to stores and warehouses. The Prince George's site is the farthest from the port.

CSX officials estimated between 300 to 600 trucks would come to the station daily to load up trains doubled-stacked with cargo containers.

Loading up trains will keep tractor-trailers from clogging highways, which benefits the environment, said Jane DeLashmutt, manager of the MDOT real estate office.

"That's 2 million trucks off the roads in 30 years," she said.

CSX officials said the project must be built somewhere in Maryland because freight shipments to Baltimore are expected to skyrocket in the coming decade after the Panama Canal expands in 2015.

Currently, most goods from China and Asia go to the West Coast and are transported by trucks cross-country.

The county site is on 70 acres of federally owned land along Edmonston Avenue.

In Prince George's, councils from College Park, Laurel and Greenbelt have written letters objecting to the plan, which they say will bring too much traffic and damage the environment, said Councilman Eric Olson (D-Dist. 3) of College Park.

"I'm dumbfounded this site is even on your list," Olson told DeLashmutt. "The fact is, it's at the headwaters of Indian Creek. For environmental reasons alone, I can't comprehend why it would be on the list at all."

DeLashmutt said the state is now studying environmental and community factors, and plans to hold public hearings with residents near each site in the fall.

Lehman said she did not believe the state was providing enough information, adding that officials were unable to answer many questions at public hearings earlier this year.

DeLashmutt and other MDOT officials declined to say when a site will be selected because they do not know when environmental studies would be completed. DeLashmutt also declined to say whether a timetable for a decision had been established either.

"You keep saying that you don't know about this. Nobody buys that. Of course you have been planning for the future," Lehman told DeLashmutt. "I question how useful it would be [to hold hearings] if you're not going to present any new information."

Residents can email comments and find out more on the state website for the project at www.intermodal.maryland.gov.

dvalentine@gazette.net